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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 000556

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR(DICARLO), EUR/SCE(HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR
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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - TENSIONS RISE AS BOSNIAKS CALL FOR
SREBRENICA "SPECIAL DISTRICT"

REF: A. SARAJEVO 456

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 362

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney. Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Since the February 26 International Court of Justice Verdict (ICJ) that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, there have been growing calls for giving the municipality special status within Bosnia. This campaign has been stoked by Bosniak politicians, particularly Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic, who wants to use the ICJ verdict as vehicle for opening up the Dayton territorial settlement. Over the weekend, Bosniaks raised the political heat by threatening, albeit privately, to declare Srebrenica's special status (outside Republika Srpska) at a March 12 meeting called by the municipality's mayor. The Ambassador and High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling spoke separately with the major Bosniak leaders as well as Republika Srpska PM Milorad Dodik and told them to avoid any rhetoric or actions that further inflamed the already tense situation in Srebrenica. Though the full conclusions of the March 12 meeting were not available as of this writing, early press reports are that participants endorsed the special status proposal, though not unilateral action. Separately, the HighRep told the Ambassador that he is increasingly worried about the direction Bosnian politics is taking and with EUFOR's drawdown plans. END SUMMARY

Special Status for Srebrenica

[1](#)2. (SBU) The February 26 ICJ verdict confirming that genocide was committed in Srebrenica has sparked increasingly strident statements about the municipality's future status within Republika Srpska (RS). A group of returnees calling itself themselves the "Initiative Committee for the Collective Expatriation of Returnees of Srebrenica Municipality" has called on Bosniaks to move out of Srebrenica en masse on March 14 because, claiming the situation there has become unbearable for returnees. The group is led by Camil Durakovic, but the most vocal member of the group is Hakiya Meholic, a Bosniak originally from Srebrenica, now resident in Tuzla. They have also called for "special status" for Srebrenica, a position endorsed by the Mothers of Srebrenica and Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic, who asserted on March 5, "Considering the fact that the Court decided that the authorities of the RS committed genocide in Srebrenica, it is necessary to restore the special status of that former protected zone of the United Nations and of the

other municipalities of eastern Bosnia from which the victims of genocide came, and to work actively and persist in a step by step restoration of constitutional arrangements that will completely annul the results of genocide."

13. (SBU) Party of Democratic Action (SDA) President Sulejman Tihic has also embraced the special status proposal, but also emphasized any change to Srebrenica's constitutional status must be agreed within existing constitutional procedures. Silajdzic and Tihic's agenda is broader than Srebrenica, however. On March 7, the two men issued a joint statement asserting that because the ICJ "...established that the Republika Srpska institutions committed genocide in Srebrenica...there is a clear need to examine the constitutional arrangements of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the administrative-territorial divisions." RS politicians have rejected these arguments and criticized "Federation politicians" for distorting and politicizing the ICJ's verdict. After some initially unhelpful statements, RS PM Milorad Dodik's comments on the verdict have stressed his government's willingness to invest more money in Srebrenica and the need for reconciliation. In a March 11 interview with a Belgrade based daily, Dodik acknowledged that genocide had occurred in Srebrenica.

The Mayor Calls Public Meeting to Calm Things Down

14. (SBU) In an effort to calm tensions and discourage support for the mass emigration campaign, Srebrenica mayor Abdurrahman Malkic (SDA), invited political leaders from both entities and members of the international community to a meeting in Srebrenica on Monday, March 12. Malkic does not

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support the move-out campaign, but has long advocated for "special status" for Srebrenica. His proposal calls for the creation of an enterprise zone to encourage more investment in Srebrenica and establishment of an infrastructure development fund for the municipality, but not for a change in the constitution. All the leading Bosniak politicians attended the Malkic meeting, but RS officials refused to attend after several Bosniak politicians publicly predicted the meeting would endorse special status for Srebrenica. Dodik responded swiftly and sharply to these comments by underscoring his duty to protect the constitutional and legal position of the RS. Any attempt to violate this structure would cause the RS government to put in place a provisional administration, he warned. Dodik also warned foreign ambassadors to stay away from the meeting, noting he would interpret their attendance as "support for the destabilization of the RS constitutional framework and the destruction of the Dayton Accords." (Note: The Turkish and several Organization of Islamic Conference Ambassadors attended. At a March 9 meeting, other SBA Ambassadors agreed not to attend. End Note.)

U.S. and OHR Work Behind the Scenes

15. (C) However well intentioned, Malkic's call for a public meeting stoked the fire over Srebrenica rather than doused it, and over the weekend the Bosniaks raised the rhetorical ante by suggesting the meeting ought to simply declare a special status for Srebrenica. In separate private exchanges with the Ambassador and High Representative Schwarz-Schilling over the weekend and Monday, March 12, Silajdzic and Tihic proclaimed that they were no longer prepared to submit to the "Serb agenda" in Bosnia. Both men chastised the international community for its "tepid" response to the ICJ verdict, particularly the international community's failure to embrace their logic that the verdict required a change in Bosnia's constitutional structures. "Why is the international community protecting the perpetrators of genocide rather than helping its victims?" they asked. In his meeting with the HighRep, Silajdzic threatened to send

Bosniak police to Srebrenica saying, "we have stronger police than the Serbs." Silajdzic also demanded that the HighRep impose police reform and told Schwarz-Schilling that if he was unprepared to use the Bonn Powers, he ought "to go home."

¶6. (C) Both the Ambassador and the HighRep warned Silajdzic and Tihic that the international community would not tolerate any action by Bosniaks that undermined Dayton, including a unilateral declaration of special status for Srebrenica. Constitutional change required consensus and support from two-thirds of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Ambassador and HighRep emphasized. They urged Silajdzic and Tihic to use the Malkic meeting to reduce tensions within the municipality, suggesting that they focus discussion on economic and social conditions there and what might be done to improve them. (Note: The Ambassador delivered the same message to Social Democratic Party leader Zlatko Lagumdžija. End Note) Silajdzic and Tihic responded that the call for special status for Srebrenica was a grass roots movement, to which Bosniak political leaders had a responsibility to listen. The Ambassador also called Dodik and urged him to refrain from making any statements that might further inflame tensions in Srebrenica. Dodik agreed, and reiterated his willingness to invest more RS resources in the municipality.

High Rep Worried About Direction of Bosnian Politics

¶7. (C) At a meeting the morning of March 12, the HighRep told the Ambassador that he was "seriously concerned" about the direction in which Bosnia was headed. Together, Dodik and Silajdzic would block any reform over the next several months, the HighRep predicted. The ICJ verdict did not call into question Bosnia's constitutional structures, but the Bosniaks were seeking to exploit the verdict anyway, he stressed. He characterized the Srebrenica status issue as "a target of opportunity" and accused Silajdzic of orchestrating tensions over it. The HighRep informed the Ambassador that he sought confirmation that EUFOR could effectively intervene in Srebrenica if events got out of hand. (Note: EUFOR maintained a small but visible presence in Srebrenica today.

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End Note.) He also urged the EUFOR Commander to stop planning for additional troop reductions, a message the HighRep told the Ambassador he would deliver forcefully to the European Council as well. EUFOR needed to think more about its capacity to reinforce its operations in Bosnia and to deliver clear public messages about its ability and willingness to do so if circumstances warranted.

Comment

¶8. (C) The Bosniaks, particularly Silajdzic and his party, had expected the ICJ to rule that Serbia had committed genocide in Bosnia, which they believed would have provided them with a clear legal basis to eliminate the RS. Instead, the ICJ ruled on much narrower grounds that genocide had been committed only in Srebrenica. For Silajdzic, special status for Srebrenica is a vehicle for making the best of a disappointing ICJ outcome and demanding changes to the Dayton territorial settlement. The ICJ ruling has also fueled the rise of Bosniak nationalism, which began during the 2006 national election campaign. In this climate, the average Bosniak is sympathetic to Silajdzic's point of view, which is one reason why Tihic and Lagumdžija participated in the March 12 meeting. Growing Bosniak nationalism coupled with Dodik's penchant for rhetorical excess could mean Bosniak-Serb stalemate over most meaningful reforms for some time to come. The immediate challenge is ensuring the Silajdzic does not provoke a more serious crisis in or over Srebrenica, however. As of this writing, full conclusions from the March 12 meeting are unavailable, but according to early press reports, the meeting endorsed the special status proposal, but not unilateral action, which, if accurate, would

represent a step back from Silajdzic's weekend threats.
MCELHANEY